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ANTIQUARIAN LOGIC.

A TRUE STORY.

THE recent discovery of Roman antiquities has been followed by a correspondence, the tone of which occasionally reminds one of the disquisitions of Mr Jonathan Oldbuck. It would be invidious to particularise, where the correspondence is so recent, and where, doubtless, all that has been called forth by a discovery of considerable interest has been written in perfect good faith. But here and there we notice traces of that quality which seems peculiar to the true antiquary—the power of establishing the widest possible inferences upon the narrowest possible basis of fact.

It may not seem malapropos, therefore, to relate, at this time, a circumstance which rather more than a century ago set all England laughing, and has been made the foundation of two of the most humorous episodes in modern fiction—the famous ‘prætorium’ scene in the *Antiquary*, and the story of ‘Bill Stumps his mark’ in *Pickwick*. Amusing as both those stories are, they yield in interest to the real event on which they are founded. Mr Oldbuck had but four letters to saddle with a meaning, and although these four (A. D. L. L.) were very amusingly rendered by him into *Agricola dicavit libens lubens*, his views were not met by rival absurdities. The story also halts a little, for it requires a strong exercise of imagination to conceive that one of the ‘kale-suppers of Fife’ should have been at the pains to carve a representation of ‘Aiken Drum’s lang ladle,’ with the initials of its description appended. There is a similar inconsistency in the story of the stone which bore the sign-manual of the apocryphal Bill Stumps, to say nothing of the forced aspect of Mr Pickwick’s attack of archaeological enthusiasm, which nothing in the recorded conduct of that famous man would have led us to expect.

To turn, however, to the true story, on which these humorous episodes are founded.

Rather more than a century ago, some labourers at work in a marshy heath in Northumberland

discovered a fragment of stone which bore marks of squaring, and on which also could be traced a few symbols which seemed to the labourers to represent letters. They carried this stone to the squire of the parish, who had it cleaned; a process which led to the detection of several more letters, forming with the others an inscription of some sort. But the letters were so badly drawn, and so disfigured by time and ill-use, that it was not possible to make out very clearly what they were; and as for making any meaning out of their collective force, we shall see presently that that required the exercise of far more learning and ingenuity than were to be looked for from a simple country squire. The inscription appeared to run much in this wise:

K·E·P·O·N·T
H·I·S·S·I·D·E

But the letters, as we have said, were severally indistinct, so that some latitude was permissible in their interpretation.

The squire presently called in the aid of the rector, and together these worthies conned the worn old stone. What theories they formed respecting it, what disputes, perchance, they had over it, history sayeth not; all that is known is, that they were unable to form any satisfactory hypothesis; but feeling certain that the stone was a valuable relic of antiquity, they looked about them for proper authorities to whom they might refer the interpretation of the inscription.

It was at length decided that the parson should take a copy of the inscription, and forward it to the Antiquarian Society, with the request that the members of that learned body would favour the world with their opinion on the relic. Nothing loath, the Society proceeded to debate with their customary acumen upon all the circumstances connected with the stone and its discovery; and not satisfied with this, several members sent in written papers, which were duly read before the Society, published in its Proceedings, and copied into most of the public journals of the day.

The first theory was put forward by a writer

whom we will call Mr A. His lucubrations are too valuable to bear mutilation, so we shall give them in his own words. 'On the first examination of this stone,' he says, 'I was not able to form any satisfactory conjecture concerning the inscription; but as the identity of the place where it was found ought to be materially considered, I wrote to a gentleman of the district for information, if there were any vestiges of antiquity, such as camps, fortifications, or the like in the vicinage. In answer to which inquiry, I was informed that there was nothing of this kind which he knew of, except the ruins of a priory about a mile distant.' One might have supposed that A. would have been disheartened at this circumstance, since an inscription having relation to the priory could hardly be expected to have turned up at so considerable a distance from the building itself—or rather its ruins. But so far from being disheartened, A. was perfectly satisfied. 'This is indeed sufficient for our purpose,' he wrote, 'and clears up the matter at once. *Clemens (K·L·E) pontifex (P·O·N·T) hic jacet (H·I) sanctus (S) servus (S) dei (I·D·E)*. The second letter of the inscription is clearly an L, and the I·D·E a transposition of D E I, from the ignorance of the sculptor; the meaning altogether being, that the stone was erected to the memory of one Clement, a dignified brother in the convent. (Literally, Clement the priest here lies, a holy servant of God.) Nothing can be more plain and easy than this.'

It may be worth while to dwell a few moments on this interpretation of the inscription, because it embodies one of the most marked peculiarities of antiquarian logic. We notice, first, that a 'dignified brother in a convent' could never have been called 'pontifex' by his fellow-friars, unless they were remarkably ignorant; and even then, it would be difficult to explain why they should have gone out of their way to adopt a mode of expression which must have been wholly unfamiliar to them. But the coincidence that three letters which can be taken to stand for the name Clement, should be followed by four which form the natural abbreviation of the title 'pontifex' is too much for our antiquary. And when he finds the name and title of the departed brother followed by the usual symbols for *hic jacet*, confidence gives place to absolute certainty. Otherwise, the difficulty in the last three letters would have proved too serious even for a professed archaeologist. That a sculptor, however ignorant, having to engrave the letters D E I, should have begun with the last letter, seems to ordinary minds inconceivable; but to an antiquary who has already formed his theory, the mistake appears the most natural thing in the world. After this, the *prava latinitas* of the inscription is scarcely worth mentioning as a difficulty.

But A.'s solution was not satisfactory to all his brethren, however plain and easy it appeared to himself. Let us see what B. had to say on the subject. Again we quote the *ipsissima verba* of the ingenious archaeologist. 'I was never so much astonished in my life,' says B., 'as at the perusal of Mr A.'s solution of the inscription in question. What a forced construction! What a preposterous idea! I will grant him that K is often found on monuments of antiquity in place of C; but how, in the name of wonder, could he imagine the two following letters to be L E, which are plainly AE? But the cream of the jest is

I·D·E, a transposition of D E I' B. is very ready, it will be noticed, to point the finger of scorn at the theory of his brother antiquary; he is equally ready to put forward his own solution of the difficulty. Let us see whether it is as plain and easy as A.'s. We must premise, however, that he had the advantage over A. in having actually visited the spot where the stone had been discovered, and the ruins of the supposed priory. 'On a personal survey,' he writes, 'I have discovered that the stone was found near an old Roman military road. Here, indeed, we have a light thrown upon the subject which will clear up all manner of difficulty. First, K is often found in inscriptions for C, and here standing for Cælius—Æ, *adilis*, an officer whose business it was to see the roads kept in proper order; P·O·N·T, *pontem*; H, Hadriani (the same person who built the wall to prevent the incursions of the Picts—thence called Hadrian's Wall); ISSI, *jussu*, the first u and the former part of the latter u being obliterated; D·E, *demolisit*. (In all, *Cælius adilis Hadriani jussu, pontem demolisit*—Cælius the sedile, by the order of Hadrian, demolished the bridge.)' Nor does B. fail to assign a reason for the demolition of the bridge, a fact which at first sight might seem surprising. The morass had been drained, it appears, and thus 'the bridge was rendered unnecessary.' As for the priory, that had no existence except in the brain of A., for the ruins belong to the old bridge, says B.

It is possible that, had B.'s interpretation come first, A. would have found as much to laugh at in it, as B. found in A.'s. He was in all probability preparing to demolish the new theory, and to rehabilitate his own, when third hypothesis was set up by C., who scoffed at the two former views as 'the most ridiculous that ever entered the head of an antiquary.' C. remarks that, in inscriptions such as this one, each letter must be taken to represent a word. Just as Mr Oldbuck found a word for each letter of the inscription A. D. L. L., so C. boldly constructs a complete sentence from the fourteen letters of the Northumberland stone. 'I have taken,' he says, 'the most obvious and generally received meaning of the initials, and find the solution to stand thus: "Cæsar ex edicto per orbem nuntiatur templum hic instauratum sacrum sibi ipsi dicatum est,"' that is, "Through the edict of Cæsar, it is announced over the world that the temple here erected is consecrated to himself." Here we find Cæsar—after having, like Hercules, finished the greatest of his labours—after having extended his conquests over the Britons, usually called fierce and indomitable—erecting a temple on the limits of his ambition, and, flushed with victory, assuming the honours of a god! This, he adds, 'is the most easy and natural construction, and perfectly consonant with the precise terms in which their inscriptions were generally couched. We need no other proof to convince us of the certainty of the fact; but, as a corroborating testimony, if we look into Horace, we shall find a passage, evidently referring to this very circumstance:

The rank of god Augustus shall obtain,
With wild Britannia added to his reign.

C. does not explain how it is that history has omitted to record the fact that Augustus had 'extended his conquests over the Britons, usually called fierce and indomitable,' or had indeed ever

set foot in Britain. Apparently oblivious of this somewhat important omission, he dwells enthusiastically on the historical value of the antique relic dug up in Northumberland. 'What,' he asks, 'would a Camden or a Holinshed have given to have traced the footsteps of Augustus Cesar so far as the northernmost parts of the Brigantes (one of the divisions of the country under the Romans), or to have seen him introducing the Roman temple into Britain!' For C., like B., had been at the pains to visit the northern shire, in order to examine the now celebrated ruins, and he had come to the conclusion that both A. and B. had been mistaken as to the character of the stones. 'They bear a much greater resemblance to the remains of an old temple,' he says, 'especially one which has the uncouth figure of a sword upon it.'

C.'s labours were not unappreciated by the learned body to which he had sent them; for we find that he was at once elected as a member of the Antiquarian Society, and without a single dissentient voice.

And now there seemed nothing to prevent D., E., F., and all the other letters of the alphabet, from having their own account to give of the interesting relic. An inscription which had been so satisfactorily interpreted in three different ways might fairly be held to admit of other meanings; and as each new inquirer met with increased attention, there is every reason for believing that the world would have profited by an extended series of labours on the subject of the relic, but for an unforeseen and disastrous catastrophe.

It had not occurred either to B. or C. to make any inquiries respecting the treasure-trove in the neighbourhood of the place where the stone was found; whether they feared that others might step in and reap the reward due to their own labours, or from whatever cause, certain it is that they carried on their investigations with the most profound secrecy, until the time had come to divulge a theory—*totus, teres, atque rotundus*—to the outer world. But the results of their labours were too remarkable to remain unnoticed, even so far north as Northumberland; and thus it came to pass that in the course of time the news of the great discoveries which were being made reached the place where the stone had been found. An aged schoolmaster, amongst others, read in the papers of the day, or heard from some of his neighbours, about all the great things which had been done by the Society of Antiquaries. It is clear from the sequel that he must have been a man lost to all sense of the dignity of science. Had he but held his tongue, the world might still have admired the learning and the acumen with which our forefathers had dealt with an interesting relic of antiquity. But this hard-hearted and unfeeling old man would not hold his tongue; and it unfortunately happened that he was but too well acquainted with the real history of the stone. He remembered, he said, a kind-hearted cottager who had lived near the morass in which the stone was found. This cottager, anxious to warn all whom it might concern of the dangerous condition of the road in the neighbourhood of the morass, had been at the pains to carve upon a stone the injunction, 'Keep on this side.' But, like Bill Stubbs, the cottager was not an adept in the art of chiseling inscriptions, and accordingly the result of his labours was of a dubious character; and

being valued rather according to its merits than according to the good-will of the carver, had been presently flung into the morass. Thence it had been dug out, under the influence of some malign star, to bring confusion and ridicule upon the learned antiquaries of England.

A YORKSHIRE COAL-CELLAR.

In the centre of the Yorkshire coal-district, that is to say, in the high undulating land round Barnsley, the usual characteristics of a coal-producing country, smoke, blackness, and desolation, are supplemented by the peculiar scenery of the county. The energy and rugged determination of Yorkshiremen prove them true sons of the soil, to judge from the persevering efforts nature makes here on all sides, that her woods and brakes shall retain their dominion. Let a colliery be abandoned, and nothing but barren heaps of slack and scoria remain to shew where busy tramways once ran, and 'hands' clustered round corves of coal; straightway, juvenile woods rise up in this district as by magic, while bluebells and faintly blushing anemones carpet their feet, and hide the cinders with a thin surface of verdure. The immense beeches and aged trees of all kinds that are found in this county, relics of old Sherwood Forest, everywhere look down with encouragement upon such praiseworthy attempts on the part of their scions. These are two distinct features of the Yorkshire coal-district. Then, again, the absence of brawling streams and slaty protruding rocks, the small farm-houses that nestle under every hill, and bring under cultivation at least some patches rescued from the woodland, contrast strongly with the dull-green rounded backs of the waste mountains in the Welsh coal-fields abandoned to bogs, and tenanted only by snipe and cotton-grass. Northumberland pit villages are squalid and wretched to the last degree: the vigorous arms of the 'Poggemoor folk' suffer no dirty floors or broken windows in their neat rows of substantial stone-built cottages, where flowers brighten every lattice, and the children play, as yet happily unconscious of their doom. Perhaps, too, there are not so many public-houses; and there are certainly more schools here than in any other coal-district of our acquaintance.

With iron and coal, spite of the most rigorous laws, furnaces never seem to consume their own smoke; but in the Barnsley district, although both these substances are largely extracted and manufactured, though every form and shade of volleying, pouring, jetting, puffing, hissing, roaring, and shrieking steam and smoke abounds, the atmosphere is seldom overhung with a dark pall. Owing to its elevation, as compared with other coal-producing areas, these nuisances, together with their smuts and all other kindred abominations, are speedily dissipated. Doubtless Jack the puddler and Tom the collier will occasionally take more beer than is good for them, on exceptional Saturday nights, when their language may not be altogether parliamentary, but temperance and education have restrained much of the immorality in which they formerly claimed a vested right. The 'canny,' reserved, yet hearty character of Yorkshiremen has been tempered by participation in such calamities as have been but too frequent of late years, and of which the Oaks Colliery in its unworkable state, crowded with dead bodies, was of late but too

awful an instance. Seriousness has largely taken the place of profanity, and steadiness of disorder; while the love of horses, flowers, and fair-play, innate in Yorkshiremen, has not in the coal-district been corrupted to any great extent by the late immoral proceedings at Sheffield, or the low dog-races and similarly questionable amusements which still divert the grinders and saw-filers at that place.

But here we are at 'the bank,' having passed by two or three rows of white-washed houses, where the workmen live, and stumbled with some difficulty over divers heaps of slack and cinders, crossed by tramways, till we mounted the last 'tip' to the pit-head. We will call it the Higher Carton Colliery, belonging (as almost all the country hereabouts does) to Earl Fitzwilliam. Our guide, an old wizened man of seventy-six, but strong and hardy for his age, meets us with a brisk 'Gude morning! I'm thinking ye are rather behind time; but it does not matter—and leads us to the pit-head. A thick wire-rope, worked by a steam-engine in a house hard by, is drawing up a 'corve' of coal at the same time that an empty one goes down; while active fellows are wheeling the full corves off as fast as they come to bank, on the afore-mentioned tramways. After watching the continuous ascent and descent of the full and empty corves for a minute or two, our guide steps on to the platform just vacated by the ascending corve, and bids us do the same. Though this platform is not much more than a yard square, we three take our places, holding on to two iron bars, which cross the cage somewhat higher than our heads, not without a little inward trepidation on the part of us strangers, and a whispered comparison of ourselves to Calcraft's subjects under the fatal beam. Not a moment is lost, however, and we immediately sink; this act is followed by the same disagreeable sensations in the neighbourhood of the midriff and diaphragm as those which accompany sea-sickness. Rapidly, with an instant's pause perhaps, our cage passes beams of wood and bricks, while the light fades, grows blue, disappears. Down, down, down into darkness we sink, till, after sixty yards' descent, appears a glimmer of light. We drop down by the side of a collier with a lamp, and at the shock of touching ground, are only too glad to jump out.

The sensation of sickness has disappeared, but left us giddy and faint for a second or two, like men who walk a ship's deck in a storm. At length we find our sea-legs, and are ushered into a cheerful white-washed passage, something like those seen in jails, and lighted at intervals by gas. At the end is an office, fitted with forms, desks, &c., where another and younger attendant takes our hats and coats, and metamorphoses us into amateur colliers by the aid of flannel-jackets and low-crowned caps. Providing ourselves with safety-lamps, and a short sharp-pointed walking-stick, we now sally forth to inspect the underground economy of the pit.

From the further extremity of the gas-lighted passage, we are first conducted to the stables. Hewn from the coal itself, and cheerfully lit and white-washed, many a horse on earth might well envy their warmth. They are kept scrupulously clean, and give favourable impressions of care for the comfort of their inmates, which are now, however, at work within the recesses of the pit. A cat rubs herself with loud purring against our legs

as we emerge, just as happens in all well-conducted stables above ground, and we notice, with approval, that she is of the deepest black, as befits the locality and all its concomitants. Our preconceived notions with regard to coal-pits receive a shock as we leave the gas-light behind us and strike into the main working. There is no wet dripping from the roofs, and persistently trickling down your neck, as is the case in so many other subterranean abodes; no puddles stand in the gloom before your feet. From the drizzle and mud of a wet day in the upper air, we have all at once descended to a road strewn, it might be, with summer-dust. Dust lies thick on every projection of the black coal-wall on either side; the foot sinks deeply into it; it rises imperceptibly, and fills the eyes and mouth. The most curious sensation, however, is the perfect silence which prevails. It is almost oppressive to the ear—a silence which may be felt; and imagination increases its awe by picturing the many solid yards of rock and coal which lie between us and the active life of the upper world. No wonder that such influences are conducive to superstition with one set of minds, and to the glow of a healthy, if somewhat puritanic religion in another; that the Keltic miners of Cornwall hear the pixies sporting in their levels, and gnomes answering, knock for knock, from vast distance inside the rock at which they are quarrying; to say nothing of the Cornish belief, which is almost universal, in the divining-rod; while their Teutonic brethren in Yorkshire are regular attendants at church or meeting, earnest-minded as a body, and many of them teetotallers—far too practical to put faith in 'aught like wizards or buzzards.'

As we pass into the darkness beyond the glare of gas, and our eyes are getting accustomed to the glimmer of the safety-lamps in our hands, all at once a strong odour of the country strikes upon our senses, a whiff it might be from a hay-field 'in the leafy month of June.' The mystery is soon explained. A door is opened on one side of the dark wall beside us, and discloses a spacious barn full of hay for the horses employed in the pit. Among the many contrasts of the place, this pleasant summer scent and sight is not the least. And now we commence descending a deep incline, laid with a set of rails, while the roof and sides are contracted till you have to stoop the head, as when walking the under-decks of a man-of-war. Respiration becomes more difficult, and the air is warm and close. At every twenty yards or so of this incline, holes are cut in the coal, by the side of the tramway, to act as 'refuges,' when the train of trucks runs down here. This is done by the order of government, to prevent the numerous accidents which would otherwise occur. Our guides look round nervously, and listen once or twice, but nothing is to be heard. At length, they make us enter one of these refuges, where, on seats cut from the coal *in situ*, we wait some minutes while they eagerly listen. 'I'm thinking, Sammy,' observes the younger one, 'we can make another, eh?' 'Very well,' replies he; and we hurry on to the next 'refuge.' Immediately, a low rumble is heard from the quarter by which we have just descended. 'Keep back, gentlemen,' says Sammy. The rumbling increases, and draws nearer with many a crash and rattle, till in an instant, as it seems, the corves swiftly rush past, impelled by their own weight, in a cloud of coal-dust, and with

a rattle and shaking which reminds us of an express-train passing through a small country-station in the upper world, combined with all the variations Southey imputes to the Falls of Lodore. These corves are small but substantially built, each holding half a ton of coal; but the impetus with which they shoot past into Stygian darkness, and the resounding echoes they leave behind them, cause us to congratulate ourselves on being off their track and safe in the refuge. On we push, dimly groping our way over blocks of coal, iron rails, beams of wood, and the usual *débris* of a mine, till the rattle of an ascending set of trucks is heard, drawn up by steam-power at the pit-head. Standing aside, we suffer this to pass; and then, after some few more minutes' walking, reach the junction (as the foot of the incline is termed), where we have leisure to rest a short time and examine the corves.

It is eight hundred yards from here to the pit-head, and all around it ramify numerous smaller roads, leading to the different workings. The corves are there filled with coal, and either pushed by boys, or more usually drawn by horses, along minor tramways to this junction. The corves are black and dusty; but a train of them is just starting for a distant part of the workings, and we cannot do better, if we would gain an adequate notion of what labour in a coal-mine really is, than accompany them. Sammy and I accordingly sit on the bottom of a corve, while the other two occupy another in a similar manner; the whip is cracked, and off we go. Our position is in nowise enviable. The heat is intense, the roadway very broken and uneven; we are packed like sardines in their tin box, or slaves during the horrors of a middle passage; and while one hand is busy alleviating the miseries of the frequent jolts (the corves having no springs), the other holds the safety-lamp, to make out where we are being hurried. Rattle, rattle! jolt, jolt! through a cloud of coal-dust we are whirled, along a narrow passage, whose sides and ceiling seem more closely converging upon us each instant. 'Keep your head down!' says Sammy, and we bend almost double. At the same moment, we are aware that a train of coal is passing us. Then comes a shock that sends our heart into our mouths. The corve we are in has broken away from the rest, and run into the wall, covering Sammy with the fragments it has torn off, while a large block of coal, weighing some ten or twelve pounds, drops off the passing train on to my shoulder.

Luckily, we are not hurt, only a little blacker than we were before. Another crack of the whip, a good deal of pushing on the part of our unseen drivers, and we are once more on the rail, and rattling away into what might be the jaws of Tartarus itself. At length comes a glimmer of lamps, and we draw up with a jerk that knocks the little remaining breath out of our bodies, beside several hirsute, semi-naked colliers, who lean on their picks, help us out of our cramped positions, and chaff our conductor. 'Why, Sammy, who'd a thought of seeing you here again!' 'Ah, lads,' he replies, 'I have brought you two new workmen to take your places; and he points us out to the amused pitmen. A laugh, which apparently proceeds from the ground, causes us to discern a man lying at full length, clad only in a pair of trousers, under a shelf of coal. The lamp

under his knee shews him where to direct his blows, his pick is busily plied, while beads of perspiration stand thickly on his muscular frame, as with a lump of coal for a pillow in this recumbent position, he takes his turn at the working. The others fill the corves as rapidly as possible with the proceeds of his toil. It is explained to us that we are now two miles from the pit-head; that each man fills some twenty or twenty-one of these corves daily, thus earning six or seven shillings, but that the work is too hard for more than four or five days a week; and then, with another glance at the dark limited space where so much human energy is expended to procure us warmth, we jump into our vacant corves, and are once more whirled back through heat, dust, and darkness to the junction. We have seen the inner life of a coal-pit, and must now grope our way by another road to the pit-head.

Our walk through narrow pathway, we pass several deserted workings. These are dangerous, owing to the giving way of the roof, and thus have been disused. Weird, cold, and silent are they, as we penetrate a few yards into them, and with our safety-lamps well elevated, attempt to peer into their depths. Men have been killed or maimed in these horrid dens, ere the instinct of self-preservation mastered the love of gain, and dictated their abandonment. The men's dinners are hung against the side of the passages here and there as we pass; a needful precaution, as the pit swarms with rats. Now we arrive at the 'brattices,' or ventilating doors, which insure a thorough draught in the pit. A stream of cool air meets us, and now we reach the return current of hot and exhausted air, returning after its four-mile circuit from the other end of the pit. It is like the breath of the sirocco, causing our clothes to stick to us, and a perspiration to break out over our faces, and permeates the cooler strata of air much in the same manner as the Gulf Stream winds its long course, like a blue ribbon, unpolluted and unmingling with the colder waters of the Atlantic, for hundreds of miles. Occasionally, we pass a collier at work, with a candle stuck to a lump of clay on his hat. There is no danger of explosive gases in this well-ventilated mine; and both the dreaded fire-damp, and still more dangerous choke-damp, are almost unknown here; though not five miles from where we stood the Oaks Colliery still held its hecatomb of slain colliers, victims to imprudence and bad ventilation.

A little farther, and we reach a huge furnace, kept burning day and night, to secure an abundance of air and a thorough draught. The wooden beams which elsewhere hold up the roof, yield here to a walling of brick, and shew us that our pilgrimage is at an end, as we emerge speedily at the pit-head, from which we are soon elevated to bank. We are black with coal-dust from head to foot: our wives, indeed, would not recognise us. It is not till a week has elapsed that we can get rid of the coal engrained in our face and hands, and clinging to the roots of our hair. Still, it has been a new experience, given us an insight into the mode by which our domestic coal-cellars are supplied from the great natural coal-cellars of the nation; and last, not least, gained a large accession of sympathy for those who labour night and day in the bowels of the earth amidst heat, discomfort, and danger, to fill our grates with

fuel. We gather up our treasures of coal-fossils, many of which we dislodged for ourselves from the roof as we passed along; say a few kind words of parting and thanks to our guides, accompanying the same with a more substantial gratuity; and then emerge, as we came, over coal-tips and tramways.

The sharp air of a spring day strikes fragrantly upon our heated faces. We welcome with delight the sights and sounds of upper life, the singing of the birds, the splash of the reservoir against its barriers, the transition from the chambers of darkness and silence to the bright and bracing atmosphere of earth.

A COUNTY FAMILY.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—AT THE COTTAGE.

It was no ‘pride that aeps humility’ which caused the Blackburns to speak of their residence on the Curlew as ‘the cottage.’ It was indeed a miniature house, with everything about it, including the scenery, of the same duodecimo description. The river itself, although pretty deep, was but thirty feet across; the banks on each side, albeit quite precipitous, could scarcely be called cliffs; and although at the bridge on the road to Mosedale they diverged, leaving a broad view to the inhabitants of the Fishery, and allowing air and sun to visit it freely, at the spot on which Richard had built his bower, there was but just room for a narrow carriage-road, which led past it through the still contracting gorge to a mill about a mile up stream, after which it became a mere horse-track to Redmoor. On the opposite side there was not even a footpath, the bank descending quite sheer. Had the road not existed, the cottage would have been upon an island. As it was, it stood upon a curved promontory, the small portion of which not actually occupied by the building was devoted to the tiniest of flower-gardens; or to this the windows of the two small sitting-rooms looked, and indeed immediately opened, so that one step from either brought you among the roses, which seemed to grow in mid-stream. If there had been any object of size within sight, the whole scene would have been dwarfed, and made almost ridiculous, from the exceedingly small scale of everything; but being where it was, nothing could be more perfect and charming. It might have been transported, bridge and all, to the stage of Old Drury (on which there would have been plenty of room for it), and used with the lime-light for the performance of *La Sonnambula*. On the Curlew, there was sometimes a moon, which, in its humble way, was also not ineffectual; bridge and stream, cottage and garden, were then bathed in such dreamy splendours as no brush can portray.

There was a boat-house attached to this little territory, looking like a boat towed astern by a ship which is not much bigger; and it was for it, or rather its contents, that the whole place had been erected by Fisherman Richard without the slightest reference to the picturesque. For him the Curlew had had no other charms beyond that one caught fish in it. The decorations of the little dining-room were characteristic in a high degree of its former owner, and if not artistic, had a certain quaint and natural

fitness of their own. It was a sort of fisherman’s sanctum, where everything that is most dear to the lovers of the gentle art was reverently enshrined. Not only did every weapon—net, and rod, and spear—that is used against the finny tribe, find a place about its walls and across its low raftered roof, but even the very fishes were there that had fallen victims to them. Unlike those barbarians who eat the prisoners whom they take in war, Richard had preserved his finest captives and stuffed them. The grinning trophies of his skill swam, as it were, each in his ample glass case, round and round the room—here a vast pike with cruel jaws agape, and here a speckled trout, and here a fat round chub; each, too, had the particulars of its capture described with great minuteness upon a written label. ‘This pike was killed a little above Curlew Bridge, by Richard Blackburn, Esq., of Blackburn Manor, with this hook’ (a very rusty little weapon by this time), ‘and part of this line. It weighed twenty-seven and a half pounds;’ and so on. Stuffed water-birds, ‘Shot by Richard Blackburn of Blackburn Manor,’ alternated with their hereditary foes or victims, so that the whole apartment had the appearance of a natural history museum. The drawing-room was destitute of ornament, though literature and art were in a manner represented by the *Angler’s Guide* and a book of artificial flies, which lay on the otherwise empty shelves.

Mrs Blackburn’s efforts at decoration had been confined to the invalid’s apartment, which had, in accordance with a suggestion of Ellen’s, been wainscoted with mirrors, so that he could command from his pillow the bridge and all who passed over it, as well as the road and a long reach of river. If the poor squire had been acquainted with the poets, he might have likened himself to the Lady of Shalott, to whom the world was shewn in the same fashion; for he, too, ‘saw the highway near,’ the red cloaks of the market-girls, the pack-horses of the miller with their white sacks, the farmer ‘on his ambling pad,’ and all the life that the place afforded. For him, too, ‘the river eddy whirled’ continuously, and the still pool dimpled, while the stealthy rush of the main stream close by soothed him with its monotone. ‘Men may come and men may go,’ it doubtless said to him, if not in those very words, yet with their full significance, ‘but I flow on for ever.’ It was a tender and provident thought that had thus supplied him with visions of a world to which he would have been otherwise blind, and it seemed to afford him pleasure. That very afternoon his eyes were seen to brighten as across the little bridge rode Lucy Waller, who even so soon had come on horseback, doubtless to inquire how the sick man had borne his journey. He saw her stop to look up with pity at his open lattice-window, and to kiss her hand to Ellen standing in the garden beneath.

Lucy found her friend somewhat pale from the shock she had lately suffered, but of which Ellen said not a word. Her uncle’s conduct was inexplicable to her. She had often known him dictatorial and menacing, but always with some definite object to be gained. But what could his design be now in bidding her, as he had expressed it, ‘play fast and loose’ with Herbert Stanhope? As for obeying him, the idea never entered into her mind; but it was scarcely less degrading to have had such a shameful course of conduct enjoined upon her. Upon the

whole, taking into consideration his behaviour on the previous portion of the journey, she was inclined to think that her uncle's brain was getting disordered through his intemperate habits. But even that was not a comforting reflection, for he was not likely to amend his ways in the seclusion of the Fishery, where there was still less to occupy him than at the Manor.

'What a paradise you have got here!' cried Lucy when she found herself in the rose-garden. 'To me, just come out of smoky Mosedale, it seems too beautiful to be real. I think, as I look at it, surely this will all melt away before my eyes.'

'It is very pretty,' said Ellen sighing; 'and yet, though I have begun to miss you so already, I would not have you here with us if I could.'

'Not have me here! Why not?'

Ellen coloured; for she had uttered that wish involuntarily, with Uncle William's words about Lucy still ringing in her ears.

'Well, it seems so lonely,' said she, 'and so shut out of the world. The river, too, has such a melancholy sound.'

'As one thinks, darling, so the bell tinks,' said Lucy archly. 'What would you say, now, if I made the stream discourse music to you, and the sunshine stay here all day?'

'O Lucy, you have seen John.'

'What an excellent guesser of riddles you are, my dear,' cried Lucy laughing. 'Yes, I have seen him, and that is partly why I came so soon here to see you. I thought it would please you to know that he is so near—that if, for instance, you dropped this rose-leaf into the swift stream, it would float to him in a few minutes.'

'How good and kind you are to think of John and I, when—' There was something, if not of annoyance, yet of embarrassment in her friend's face that made Ellen hesitate to finish the sentence, as she had intended to do, with some reference to Lucy's dead lover. Something, too, there was in the nature of Lucy's last remark which suddenly struck her and made her pause. Lucy was always kind; but such a tender thought as that of the mere nearness of her lover making Ellen happy, was somewhat uncharacteristic of Mr Waller's daughter. Could love itself, new love, have possibly suggested it to her?

'What's that?' said Ellen, pretending to be interrupted by a sound that broke upon her ear—the slow beat of a horse's feet. 'There is some one coming down the road from Redmoor; I wonder whether it is Mr Stanhope.'

'It is likely enough,' said Lucy carelessly, and turning her head in the opposite direction.—'What a pretty picture might be made of yonder reach, with the arch of the bridge for its frame!' She had suddenly grown pink to the ear-tips.

'And what did you say to John, Lucy? Or, if you will not confess that, what was it he said to you?'

'Well, my darling, the fact is, he has come down again to Mosedale upon the same business as before, it seems; there is something wrong again with the reservoir. You must not be angry, dear Ellen, but I am afraid papa is vexed with Mr Denton.'

'Vexed with John?' cried Ellen, in a tone that would have fitted 'Vexed with the sunshine? vexed with the blue air?' 'What can he be vexed with John about?'

'I can't tell, dear; but so it is. Papa is greatly worried by other matters just now—grievously troubled, I may say—and doubtless he was easily put out. There has been, at all events, some difference of opinion between them; and Mr Denton declines to be our guest. I am more annoyed by it than I can tell you.'

'But what did John say, Lucy? I mean, what were his very words?'

'Oh, of course he said nothing within *my* hearing but what was pleasant: regretted exceedingly that he felt himself unable to take advantage of our hospitality, and so forth. He will be some time in the town, however, and I hope the matter will be made up: indeed, I heard him tell papa that a day or two would decide which of them was in the right.'

'But did he send no message to *me*?'

'Well, papa was with me, darling, so that he could not be very communicative; but when I spoke of you, it was easy to see in whose safe keeping he had placed his heart. I told him, of course, that you had come here, within a mile or two of Mosedale. "What! at the Fishery Cottage?" cried he; and you should have seen how he flushed up. Though you may not write to him, there would be no harm in your gathering a rose, and giving it to him by deputy, would there?'

Ellen plucked a flower, and smiling her thanks, kissed Lucy fondly.

'What! am I to give him that too?' said the other laughing.—'There, how serious that has made you look! What a thing it is to be jealous!'

'No, dear, it was not that; what makes me grave is the thought of there being any quarrel between John and Mr Waller. I can't understand it.'

'That is because you don't understand business, dear. So long as men have nothing to do with each other's affairs, they consort together as peacefully as women, and more so. They chatter and laugh, and tell stories to one another, like school-boys in holiday-time. But directly a question of pecuniary interest arises to set them in antagonism, they grow hard and rude enough.'

'But John is never hard nor rude, I am sure.'

'Well, I don't know Mr Denton so well as you do,' said Lucy laughing; 'but I must confess he was rather excited in his manner this morning—quite as much so as papa: though papa was most to blame, since he was in his own house. But, O Ellen, he is so full of trouble, if you only knew, you would forgive him all, I'm sure.—But hush; don't let us talk about it. Here is some one coming.—Why, how slowly you ride, Mr Stanhope! We have heard your horse's hoofs this quarter of an hour. We thought it was the miller's nag with the sacks.'

'I am glad to hear that any grist comes to my mill,' said Herbert rather ruefully. 'Mr Moffat has just been proving to me that it never does.—How is your grandfather, Miss Ellen, after his long drive? And how do you all like your new quarters? At present, I can scarcely congratulate you upon the change: I have not seen you look so pale these many weeks. I am afraid you had an anxious journey.'

'I am quite well, thank you,' said Ellen coldly; for there was something just then displeasing to her in the manifestation of Mr Stanhope's interest; 'but we are all a little tired.'

'Don't you believe her,' cried a gruff voice from the dining-room, where Mr William had been keeping himself private with the object of ascertaining whether Ellen should say anything to Lucy of his recent behaviour, but had only overheard enough of the conversation to make him suspicious. 'We are only moped to death in this rat-hole. Come in, and let's be jolly. What say you to our taking the young ladies on the water? Miss Lucy will come with me in the skiff, and you can take the punt with Ellen.'

'Thank you, Mr William, but I have no time just now,' said Lucy, gathering up the skirts of her riding-habit. 'I promised papa to return home as soon as I had seen how you all were.'

'And I must go up to grandfather,' said Ellen, 'and take him these flowers.—Good-bye, dear Lucy; you will be here early to-morrow, will you not, and spend a good long day with us?'

'As soon after breakfast as I can get papa away, dear; and I will be sure not to forget your message.'

'Message! what message?' inquired Mr William testily, with a mistrustful glance at his niece.

'Never you mind, Mr William,' said Lucy gaily; 'that message is under the rose.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.—THE WARNING.

As is usual with folks who find themselves in new quarters, the household at the Fishery were astir early the next morning, which was a warm and sunny one. Mr William—who had retired late, as was his wont, and kept Stanhope from his bed with urgent appeals for another cigar and one more glass of grog—rose earlier than any. He was heard fussing about the house a little after dawn, and rousing up the old fisherman, who was attached to the premises much as the punt was, without which he rarely moved. He had been Squire Richard's factotum on the river, and had gauged the capacity of every curve, and fall, and pool with respect to fish. The previous night, he had cast bread upon the waters in the shape of a gallon of worms, in a particular spot miles away down stream—from which investment he had promised Mr William great results; and the two were off together, long before the breakfast-hour, on that hopeful expedition. They had taken plenty of provisions with them, and it was understood that they would not return till late in the afternoon. Ellen at her chamber-window heard their gruff voices mingle with the grating of the punt-pole, and saw them glide astern across the yielding lilies, and into the shadow of the bridge; and sighed. They were going whither she would fain have gone, poor girl; and would presently pass Mosedale, and perhaps see him.

The swallows were skimming across the stream, and dipping their wings; the dragon-flies were flitting about like living light; the fish leaped high in air, and sank in widening circles; and all the life of the river was awake and glad. The garden beneath, new dipped in dew, sent up its grateful incense; and the fresh voices of the air seemed to call to her to come forth and enjoy. Ah! if she could only have been free to welcome him to that new home, how fair and bright a place it would have seemed! For a moment she was almost tempted to inquire why that slender skein of duty should bind her hand and foot as it did, and keep

her from him she loved, when the least effort of her own would have snapped it. But she put the thought away from her as swiftly as it had intruded, and descended, all the more charming for her victory, to gather a posy for the breakfast-table, and, as fresh and bright as any rosebud of them all, to busy herself with household cares. Then, after breakfast, as usual, to grandfather's room, there to stay for the long morning.

Virtue had its reward for her in at least this respect, that the loving forethought that had supplied the sick man with these living pictures of the world without, now bore fruit for her also. It was almost as good as being out of doors that day—bright herald of the coming summer though it was—to sit in that mirrored chamber, and watch all things move around her; for all things had motion; even the bridge would change from gloom to gray, from gray to gloom, as the light clouds flecked the sun, or left it bare; and the one willow for which the road had room, hanging its disheveled hair in the restless stream, 'shook alway' like a poplar. The feathery reeds in the island below bridge danced like the daffodils, and, like them, made a picture in her mental eye for ever. Suddenly she started up with a muffled cry, and looked towards the window; on the shining wall beside her had been cast the reflex of an approaching horseman; and he is now upon the bridge. His eyes are fixed upon the cottage, upon the window, upon her. He touches the red rose that blushes in his button-hole, and doffs his hat. What can have brought John Denton hither, whom her grandfather has forbidden to visit her? whom she has passed her word she will not receive? The sick man has seen him also, and fixes on her a reproving look. It seems to say as plainly as spoken words: 'I am obeyed no longer, then, being smitten thus sorely, and already half dead; and yet I have loved you so, Nelly, and tended you in the days gone by.'

'You do me wrong, grandfather,' cried she passionately. 'I know that you think I have disobeyed you, and broken my word, but indeed it is not so. I don't know why John is here. If you forbid it, I will not see him—if you do forbid it.' And although her tone might have melted a harder heart than his, he did forbid it. Had he been lying for months with nought to comfort him but the thought of how the Blackburn race might still hold its own and keep its place, through her, to forego his desire now, when all but accomplished—with the very man beneath his roof to whom he looked to have her wedded? Had he not even given him his Will in keeping, in token of that confidence? Was not the world aware and expectant of her matching with him? Had not his reprobate son himself submitted to the arrangement as inevitable? And now, should he risk all being undone by permitting this John Denton to see Nelly? No, no.

'Do not fear, grandfather; since you forbid it, I will not see him; I will stay here,' and she drew her chair behind the curtain of the bed, out of his sight, and listened with pale face, pressing her hand against her beating heart. Presently Mrs Blackburn's hurried step was heard upon the stairs, and she came in looking confused and troubled.

'Nelly,' whispered she, 'I want you a minute; come outside with me.'

'Grandfather knows,' said Ellen quietly. 'He saw John Denton come over the bridge.'

Mrs Blackburn glanced at the sick man; his eyes were moist, and had an expression in them of unwanted tenderness.

'Has he given you leave to see him?' said she. 'If so, why, of course, I shall say nothing: though it seems a pity, after matters have gone so far with Mr Stanhope; and I am afraid Willy will be very angry.'

'I care nothing for Uncle William's anger, grandmother,' said Ellen proudly; 'but I have promised not to see John, and I will keep my word, since grandfather will not loose me from it.'

There was a knock at the door: a gentleman had come, said the servant, to see Mr William Blackburn on very important business.

'To see Willy? What can John Denton want to see my Willy for? He has no right to pick a quarrel with him, you know, Ellen,' said Mrs Blackburn apprehensively.

'John Denton is not quarrelsome, grandmother, whatever folks may choose to say,' answered Ellen resolutely, and piqued by the recollection of Lucy's words the previous day; 'and if he has important business, it ought to be listened to.'

'Well, we all know what the business is about,' responded Mrs Blackburn tartly; 'and, for my part, I won't see him, and that's flat; and I am sure if Willy was here he would say the same.—Go down to the gentleman, Mary, and say Mr William is from home, and will not return till the evening; and say that I am very sorry, but that I am engaged in Mr Blackburn's sick-room.'

Ellen thought, with indignation, that her grandmother might at least have gone down and spoken civilly to John, who had been always so kind to her; but she was too proud to say so. She sat where she was, following with reproachful eyes the movements of Mrs Blackburn, who affected to busy herself about the room, but who was in reality sufficiently uncomfortable. She knew in her heart that she was not acting well; but she feared to meet John face to face, who had always had great influence over her, and whose present grounds of complaint she could not gainsay.

Anthony lay with eyes fast closed, but perhaps listening as eagerly as the others.

The maid came up again with a second message. 'It was impossible,' the gentleman said, 'that he could leave the house without making the communication he was charged with to some member of the family.'

'Then let Mr Stanhope see him,' said Mrs Blackburn, 'for there's nobody else to do it.'

'Stop!' said Ellen decisively; 'that shall not be, grandmother. You may treat John as ill as you please, but not falsely. If Mr Stanhope is to see him, it must be only as grandfather's friend. I have borne enough as it is.'

'You are a naughty, disobedient girl,' said Mrs Blackburn angrily. 'If your grandfather could only speak, you would not dare to behave so.'

'I should be sorry, indeed, for him to think ill of me,' said Ellen firmly; 'but if you persist in your intention to insult John in the way you speak of, I will go down to him myself, and take his hand—and—and you will never see me here again, grandmother.'

'Do you hear that, Anthony?' cried Mrs Blackburn with indignation. 'Willy always told me that you were wrong in thinking so highly of

Ellen; and yet they say you have left all your money to this girl, who flouts you thus away from him.'

'I do not want grandfather's money,' said Ellen quietly, 'as he well knows. I have never tried to win anything from him but his love.—If you think it is right that John Denton should be told what is not the truth, grandmother, look at me now and say so with your eyes.—See, he keeps them fast closed! I knew he was not one to approve of what is false, in order to gain his ends.'

'Well, well, I will go and see Mr Stanhope myself, and explain matters,' said Mrs Blackburn in a conciliating tone.

'Nay, grandmother, but I must send the message,' said Ellen with quiet determination.—'Come in, Mary' (for the girl had been bidden to wait outside the door). 'You are to tell Mr Denton from your mistress, with her compliments, that no member of the family can see him to-day; but that if the nature of his business will permit him to do so, he can communicate it to Mr Stanhope, who is in the dining-room.'

The servant departed, repeating to herself Miss Ellen's words, for fear she should forget them; and in a minute or two Stanhope's step was heard leaving the apartment below for the drawing-room, into which the visitor had been shewn.

John Denton and the young Squire of Curlew Hall had never met since they had stood together on Slogan, eighteen months ago; and during that interval, short as it was, there had been considerable change in both of them. John, always self-reliant and self-composed, had become even more conscious of his own powers, of which his improved position in the world had also afforded ample proof, had he needed such. Instead of the somewhat coarse attire which he had worn as overseer, he was now dressed, although very plainly, in all respects as a gentleman; and he looked every inch a gentleman, and something more. If there was an absence of that careless ease which sits (not ungracefully) upon those for whom all things have been made smooth from the cradle to manhood, the steady purpose of his face was far from hard or egotistic; while, as he now regarded his rival (as he well knew him in intention to be), a certain chivalrous courtesy lit up his fine features, and gave his tone a gentleness with which genuine feeling could always inspire it, but which, in conventional intercourse, it lacked.

Perhaps the knowledge that Ellen's heart was his, not to be won from him by this man, nor any other, permitted him to be thus generous; or perhaps the straitened, if not desperate circumstances of his rival, of which he had heard reports (unfounded, indeed, though, as it happened, true enough) in Mosedale, affected him with pity, and gave softness to his air and manner.

Herbert Stanhope was even more altered in appearance, though not, as in the other's case, for the better. He had grown paler and thinner of late months; and anxiety and wounded pride had set their marks upon a face that had once evoked Denton's antagonism by its calm insouciance.

The two young men shook hands, if not with cordiality, yet with perfect frankness.

'I am sorry to have been thus obliged to trouble you, Mr Stanhope,' said Denton, 'but, since Mr William Blackburn is not at home, I have no choice; the matter on which I have come here

being, unhappily, of the last importance, and not admitting of delay.'

'No apology is at all necessary, Mr Denton; the occupation you have interrupted was only that of making artificial flies; and I assure you that the arrival of any visitor in this place, whatever his business, is quite a godsend to us. I think I should remark, however, that if the matter in question, which you say is so important, has any private and particular reference to Mr Blackburn, I have no authority, and indeed must altogether decline to be its recipient.'

'The matter I have in hand,' said Denton gravely, 'touches Mr William Blackburn only as it affects every one else in this house, yourself included. It is not, I confess, upon his account I have come. I mentioned his name merely as being the most proper person to receive my communication; and yet, if there had been none dearer to me under this roof than he, I should still have thought it my duty to have made it. I must beg of you, first of all, Mr Stanhope, to take upon trust, with only my word to guarantee it—that I am well acquainted with certain matters connected with my profession, which is that of civil engineer, that I am not one to be mistaken, for instance, about the strength of an embankment. And it is with the acutest sense of the peril in which you and all persons now resident on the Curlew stand from the state of the reservoir on Redmoor, that I have ridden here this day, and with no other object whatsoever.'

'Do you mean to tell me that there is any danger of the great embankment on the moor giving way, Mr Denton?' asked Stanhope, starting to his feet.

'There is, in my opinion, very great danger of it; I should say, indeed, if the wind were east instead of south, as at present, the most imminent danger. In that case, the wind would bring the waves right down upon the embankment; and it is not in a condition to resist it, sir, it is not indeed. I entreat you, I adjure you, Mr Stanhope, to give heed to what I say.'

'There is no fear of my neglecting such a warning, Mr Denton. Independently of the risk to our friends in this house, and to human life generally, supposing I were so brutal as to disregard it, I have property on the Curlew which, even if this catastrophe should be delayed, must sooner or later be destroyed by it. I will not only do my best to persuade Mr Blackburn and his family to quit this spot, but I shall not lose a moment in representing to the authorities at Mosedale, with whom I have some influence.'

'That would be time wasted,' interrupted Denton solemnly, 'and there is, in my judgment, not one hour to waste. I have spoken—I have warned in vain. The directors of the company, in the person of their chairman, have refused to accede to my request that the reservoir should be examined.'

'But I thought that matter was looked to last year, and, if I remember rightly, you yourself, Mr Denton, were the engineer appointed for that very purpose.'

'I was, sir; and I made my Report, wherein, as you may read for yourself, I even then contended that not enough had been done for safety. From personal observation of the embankment the last two days, I am confident that mischief of a magnitude such as those people yonder—and he pointed

westward with his hand—'have no conception of, is—Good Heaven! what is that?'

'It is my miller's fowling-piece, if I am not much mistaken,' said Stanhope smiling, 'though the echoes of the Curlew make its sound somewhat portentous. Did you think it was the bursting of the dam?'

'Do not jest, Mr Stanhope—do not treat my apprehensions as if they were idle fears. I am a young man, but not ignorant of the things of which I speak. I am as sure of what I now tell you as I am of my own existence.'

'But it seems so strange, Mr Denton, that these directors should not in so important a matter have taken action upon the Report of their own officer.'

'I was not their ordinary engineer, sir; but only the substitute for him. My friend Mr Flywheel delegated me to act for him in the affair, which he did not understand to be of the magnitude and importance which it really was. If he were on the spot now, I would stake my existence that his view would be the same as mine—that he would have the dam blown up this very hour, so as to decrease the water-pressure. There was a crack in the embankment last year that was sufficient to admit a penknife; there is one to-day in which I can almost place my hand.'

'But why is not Mr Flywheel at his post?'

'He is abroad, sir, employed on an Italian railway. I would to Heaven he were here.'

'But you in his absence are his representative, are you not?'

'I was, sir,' answered Denton, with flashing eyes, 'until yesterday. But when I found I was not listened to by the Reservoir Board, I at once threw up my appointment. To hold it for another day, would be, in my judgment, to be accessory before the fact to—But Heaven only knows to what; there is no limit to the ruin which may happen.'

'Then you are not come here in any official capacity, Mr Denton?'

'In none whatever, sir; though, of course, if my profession were not what it is I should feel no cause for these apprehensions. I have lately been appointed resident engineer on the Mosedale Railway, or I should not have been in the town at all. If, if—and the young man hesitated, and crimsoned to the forehead—if circumstances had not brought one that is dearer to me than life itself into this perilous place, I should not perhaps have visited Redmoor at all. God grant that I have not done so, even now, in vain. You will not neglect this warning, Mr Stanhope—promise me that; or beware lest the guilt of blood—the destruction of man and woman, as well as the ruin of hearth and homestead—should lie at your door.'

It was curious to see how, as the one seemed to grow more earnest and impassioned with every word, the other became more calm, and even incredulous.

'I will certainly put our friends here on their guard, Mr Denton. I am sure it is most kind of you.'

'It is nothing of that sort, Mr Stanhope,' broke in the other. 'You do not say it is kindness to warn a bather who cannot swim of a current which you know will sweep him to his death. It is my duty, and nothing more. You, sir, can have no miserable reasons, founded on a few pounds of cost, to refuse to listen to me, such as have made those in Mosedale deaf and blind; nor, as I trust, have

you any personal prejudice so strong against me as to make you discredit my words because they are mine.'

'Indeed, Mr Denton,' returned Stanhope, flushing in his turn, 'you do me no more than justice. It is impossible to misunderstand your motive, or to fail to be moved by such generous earnestness: you may depend upon it, so far as my influence extends in this household, your warning shall have all the attention which it deserves.'

'Thank you, Mr Stanhope, thank you,' said Denton fervently, as he held out his hand. 'You have taken a weight from off my mind such as I can scarcely bear to think of, even now that it is gone.—Good-bye, sir; and God bless you.'

Stanhope accompanied him to the door, and saw him mount and turn his horse's head towards Redmoor. 'Are you going to take another look, then, at the embankment yonder?'

'Yes, Mr Stanhope, though it is useless. I am also going to Curlew Mill to give my warning there. I am not permitted to avert this peril, it seems; but, so far as in me lies, I must strive to abate its consequences,' and with one look up at the sky, where the light clouds were floating leisurely to eastward, he shook the reins and cantered up the gorge.

NONSENSE-VERSES.

WHOEVER, in these days of struggle and hard work, adds to 'the public stock of harmless pleasure,' is peculiarly deserving of a word of praise. Even the wit that is most common at present consists chiefly in verbal ingenuity, and is at best but an intellectual puzzle, which rather strains than relaxes the brains that have so much need of repose. It is something that nobody can urge against *The Bab Ballads*,^{*} the charge that they weary the mental faculties, and it is more to promise that they must needs elicit a hearty laugh from all who are capable of understanding fun at all. The author himself has affixed to them this modest motto: 'Much Sound and little Sense.' But the sound that belongs to them is one of the healthiest—a hearty roar; and their sense is at least sufficient to tickle the heart-strings. Their excessive simplicity—their utter absurdity—take the reader by storm, and forbid him, unless he is one of those unfortunates who are nothing if they are not critical, to speculate upon the why and wherefore of his mirth. In illustration of the letterpress there are numbers of funny little pictures, it is unhappily out of our power here to reproduce, but which doubtless heighten the whimsicality. In this respect, as in others, the author-artist reminds us of Tom Hood, a few strokes of whose pencil could give a marvellous effect to his humour; but in the present case, the sketches are well drawn as well as intensely funny. Pride and Humility, Dissipation and Puritanism, Ferocity, Despair, and even Beauty, all receive in turn their grotesque impersonations in this little volume. The ballads themselves, as will be seen, are also like the verse of him who was wont to supply us with metrical mirth in those absurd annuals characteristically entitled *Laughter from Year to Year*. But Mr Gilbert (bless him!) is more absurd even than Hood.

* *The Bab Ballads.* By N. S. Gilbert. Hotten: London.

Take, for instance, his ballad of *Captain Reece*, the model captain of that model ship, the *Mantelpiece*, with his advanced ideas of promoting the happiness of his men, and doing his duty by them.

If ever they were dull or sad,
Their captain danced to them like mad,
Or told, to make the time pass by,
Droll legends of his infancy.

A feather-bed had every man,
Warm slippers, and hot-water can,
Brown Windsor from the captain's store,
A valet, too, to every four.

Did they with thirst in summer burn?
Lo, seltzogenes at every turn;
And on all very sultry days,
Cream-ices handed round on trays.

Then currant wine and ginger pops
Stood handily on all the 'tops';
And, also, with amusement rife,
A 'Zoetrope, or Wheel of Life.'

New volumes came across the sea
From Mister Mudie's libraree;
The Times and *Saturday Review*
BeGUILED the leisure of the crew.

Kind-hearted Captain Reece, R.N.,
Was quite devoted to his men;
In point of fact, good Captain Reece
Beatified the *Mantelpiece*.

Yet, even as it was, he doubted whether enough had been done for their comfort, and inquired of them how he could pleasure them further. William Lee, the kindly captain's cockswain,

A nervous, shy, low-spoken man,
Then cleared his throat, and thus began:

'You have a daughter, Captain Reece,
Ten female cousins, and a niece,
A ma, if what I'm told is true,
Six sisters, and an aunt or two.

'Now, somehow, sir, it seems to me,
More friendly-like we all should be,
If you united of 'em to
Unmarried members of the crew.

'If you'd ameliorate our life,
Let each select from them a wife
And as for nervous me, old pal,
Give me your own enchanting gal!'

Good Captain Reece, that worthy man,
Debated on his cockswain's plan:
'I quite agree,' he said, 'O Bill;
It is my duty, and I will.'

'My daughter, that enchanting gurl,
Has just been promised to an earl,
And all my other familee
To peers of various degree.'

'But what are dukes and viscounts to
The happiness of all my crew?
The word I gave you I'll fulfil;
It is my duty, and I will.'

One would have thought that this complaisance would have been enough, and perhaps the cockswain was content with it, and touched with the captain's reflection that he should now be 'the only bachelor on board,' let us hope that it was no mere wish to aggrandise his own family which induced him to reply in this manner:

'I beg your honour's leave,' he said,
If you would wish to go and wed,

'I have a widowed mother, who
Would be the very thing for you—
She long has loved you from afar;
She washes for you, Captain R.'

The captain saw the dame that day—
Addressed her in his playful way :
'And did it want a wedding-ring?
It was a tempting ickle sing !'

'Well, well; the chaplain I will seek;
We'll all be married this day week—
At yonder church upon the hill;
It is my duty, and I will !'

The sisters, cousins, aunts, and niece,
And widowed ma of Captain Reece,
Attended there as they were bid;
It was their duty, and they did.

The portraits of the obliging captain, of the 'enchanting gurl' of Mr Lee, and of the 'tempting ickle sing' (fancy Mrs Gamp being chucked under the chin!), are quite worthy of the immortal verse to which they are wedded.

The *Periwinkle Girl* contains a moral not inferior to that of *Pamela*, and, we may add, is infinitely more amusing. Our author himself had taken a prejudice against winkles in early life. He had reflected that he would not himself have exchanged places with that delicacy even if he could; for a winkle, as he put it to himself, could seldom flirt, and never dance,

Nor soothe his mind by smoking.

But then he had not become acquainted with Mary who sold them.

Both high and low, and great and small, fell prostrate at her tootsies;
They all were noblemen, and all had balances at Coutta's.

Dukes with the lovely maiden dealt, Duke Bailey and Duke Humphry,
Who eat her winkles till they felt exceedingly uncomfy.

Duke Bailey greatest wealth computes, and sticks, they say, at no-thing;
He wears a pair of golden boots and silver under-clothing.

Duke Humphy, as I understand, though mentally acuter,
His boots are only silver, and his underclothing pewter.

A third adorer had the girl, a man of lowly station—
A miserable grov'ling earl besought her approbation.

This humble cad she did refuse with much contempt and loathing.
He wore a pair of leather shoes and cambric underclothing.

'Ha! ha!' she cried; 'upon my word! Well, really—come, I never!
Oh, go along; it's too absurd! My goodness!
Did you ever?

'Two dukes would make their Bowles a bride,
and from her foes defend her—'

'Well, not exactly that,' they cried; 'we offer guilty splendour.

'We do not offer marriage-rite; so please dismiss the notion!'

'Oh, dear,' said she, 'that alters quite the state of my emotion.'

The earl he up, and says, says he: 'Dismiss them to their orgies,
For I am game to marry thee quite reg'lar at St George's.'

He'd had, it happily befell, a decent education;
His views would have befitted well a far superior station.

His sterling worth had worked a cure; she never heard him grumble;
She saw his soul was good and pure, although his rank was humble.

Her views of earldoms and their lot, all underwent expansion;
Come, Virtue in an earldom's cot! Go, Vice in ducal mansion!

It is only rarely that our author ventures to lay down his fool's bauble, and deal in a little sentiment; but when he does so, his resemblance to his great master becomes more striking than ever. The whole poem entitled *Haunted* might be taken for Hood's own, and would do his memory no wrong if it were published as such.

Haunted? Ay, in a social way,
By a body of ghosts in dread array :
But no conventional spectres they—
Appalling, grim, and tricky :
I quail at mine as I'd never quail
At a fine traditional spectre pale,
With a turnip head and a ghostly wail,
And a splash of blood on the dicky.

Mine are horrible, social ghosts,
Speeches and women, and guests and hosts,
Weddings and morning calls and toasts,
In every bad variety :
Ghosts that hover about the grave
Of all that's manly, free, and brave :
You'll find their names on the architrave
Of that charnel-house, Society.

Black Monday—black as its school-room ink—
With its dismal boys that snivel and think
Of its nauseous messes to eat and drink,
And its frozen tank to wash in.
That was the first that brought me grief
And made me weep, till I sought relief
In an emblematical handkerchief,
To choke such baby bosh in.

First and worst in the grim array—
Ghosts of ghosts that have gone their way,
Which I wouldn't revive for a single day
For all the wealth of Plutus—
Are the horrible ghosts that school-days scared :
If the classical ghost that Brutus dared
Was the ghost of his 'Cesar' unprepared,
I'm sure I pity Brutus.

I pass to critical seventeen ;
The ghost of that terrible wedding-scene,
When an elderly colonel stole my queen,
And woke my dream of heaven.
No school-girl decked in her nurse-room curls,
Was my gushing innocent queen of pearls ;
If she wasn't a girl of a thousand girls,
She was one of forty-seven !

I see the ghost of my first cigar—
Of the thence-arising family jar—
Of my maiden brief (I was at the bar),
(I called the judge 'Your wushup !'),

Of reckless days and reckless nights,
With wrenched-off knockers, extinguished lights,
Unholy songs, and tipsy fights,
Which I strove in vain to hush up.

Ghosts of fraudulent joint-stock banks,
Ghosts of 'copy, declined with thanks,'
Of novels returned in endless ranks,
And thousands more, I suffer.
The only line to fitly grace
My humble tomb, when I've run my race,
Is: 'Reader, this is the resting-place
Of an unsuccessful duffer.'

I've fought them, all these ghosts of mine;
But the weapons I've used are sighs and brine,
And now that I'm nearly forty-nine,
Old age is my chieftest bogey;
For my hair is thinning away at the crown,
And the silver fights with the worn-out brown;
And a general verdict sets me down
As an irreclaimable fogey.

The echoes of other metrical jokers beside Hood linger about this little book; you are reminded here of Thomas Ingoldsby, and there of the joint authors of *Bon Gaultier*; but in almost all the ballads there is something quite original too: the author holds the patent for a certain monopoly in absurdity which we have never seen infringed. The difficult quest upon which Elvira despatched her Ferdinand, was surely never hit upon before as a test of true affection.

Send me to the Arctic regions, or illimitable azure,
On a scientific goose-chase, with my Connell or my
Glaisher!
Tell me whether I may hie me—tell me, dear one,
that I may know—
Is it up the highest Andes? down some horrible
volcano?
But she said: 'It isn't polar bears, or hot volcanic
grottoes;
Only find out who it is that writes these lovely cracker
mottos!'

Again, who but our author himself would have conceived the idea of one curate, famed for his mildness, planning the assassination of another, because he exceeded him in that virtue!

Wild Croquet Hooper banned, and all the sports of
Mammon;
He warred with Cribbage, and he exorcised Back-
gammon.

But the Rev. Hopley Porter, at Assesmilk-cum-
worter, was even milder—

He labours more than you, at worsted-work, and
frames it;
In old maids' albums, too, sticks seaweed, yes, and
names it.

The beadle and sexton are therefore despatched, as bravoes, and demand a change of habits in Hopley Porter, or his life, at their daggers' point. So far from becoming a martyr to his principles, he accedes to their demands with almost indecent haste.

'What?' said that reverend gent;
'Dance through my hours of leisure?
Smoke?—bathe myself with scent?—
Play croquet? Oh, with pleasure!

'Wear all my hair in curl?
Stand at the door and wink—so—
At every passing girl?
My brothers, I should think so!

'For years I've longed for some
Excuse for this revulsion:
Now that excuse has come—
I do it on compulsion!!!'

He smoked and winked away—
This Reverend Hopley Porter—
The deuce there was to pay
At Assesmilk-cum-worter.

And Hooper holds his ground,
In mildness daily growing;
They think him, all around,
The mildest curate going.

The colonial Bishop attending the Pan-Anglican Synod, who learns posturing (oh, such pictures!) of a street acrobat, in order to impress his people at Rum-ti-Foo—

His people—twenty-three in sum,
Who played the eloquent tum-tum,
And lived on scalps served up in rum,
The only sauce they knew—

is a charming creation. So is the precocious Baby, who turned up his little nose at the food provided for him—

'My friends, it's a tap, that is not worth a rap'
(Now this was remarkably excellent pap);

who chuckled his old nurse under the chin, with his

Fal lal lal, you doosed fine gal;

and who finally—a warning to all precocious babes—died 'an enfeebled old dotard, at five.' Baines Carew, gentleman, and attorney-at-law, who is so overcome with sympathy for his clients that he faints on the floor at the recital of their wrongs, and they are obliged to go elsewhere for a lawyer, is also one of these touches *contrary to nature* which makes the whole world kin—or, at all events, so much of it as loves a joke. But the very best of all these Ballads, and one that seems to us quite unrivalled for its grotesque humour, is the yarn of the *Nancy Bell*, which is, it seems, set to music and published as a song; and much we should like to hear it.

'Twas on the shores that round our coast
From Deal to Ramsgate span,
That I found alone, on a piece of stone,
An elderly naval man.

His hair was weedy, his beard was long,
And weedy and long was he;
And I heard this wight on the shore recite,
In a singular minor key:

'Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy brig*,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig.'

And he shook his fists and he tore his hair,
Till I really felt afraid,
For I couldn't help thinking the man had been
drinking,
And so I simply said:

'Oh, elderly man, it's little I know
Of the duties of men of the sea,
And I'll eat my hand if I understand
How you can possibly be

'At once a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig!'

Then he gave a hitch to his trousers, which
Is a trick all seamen larn,
And having got rid of a thumping quid,
He spun this painful yarn :

'Twas in the good ship *Nancy Bell*
That we sailed to the Indian sea,
And there on a reef we come to grief,
Which has often occurred to me.

'And pretty nigh all o' the crew was drowned
(There was seventy-seven o' soul) ;
And only ten of the *Nancy*'s men
Said "Here" to the muster-roll.

'There was me, and the cook, and the captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And the bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig.

'For a month, we'd neither wittles nor drink,
Till a-hungry we did feel ;
So we drew a lot, and, accordin' shot
The captain for our meal.

'The next lot fell to the *Nancy*'s mate,
And a delicate dish he made ;
Then our appetite with the midshipmite
We seven survivors stayed.

'And then we murdered the bo'sun tight,
And he much resembled pig ;
Then we wittled free, did the cook and me,
On the crew of the captain's gig.

'Then only the cook and me was left,
And the delicate question : "Which
Of us two goes to the kettle?" arose,
And we argued it out as such.

'For I loved that cook as a brother, I did,
And the cook he worshipped me ;
But we'd both be blowed if we'd either be stowed
In the other chap's hold, you see.

'I'll be eat if you dines off me,' says Tom.
"Yes, that," says I, "you'll be."
"I'm boiled if I die, my friend," quoth I ;
And "Exactly so," quoth he.

'Says he : "Dear James, to murder me
Were a foolish thing to do,
For don't you see that you can't cook *me*,
While I can—and will—cook *you*!"'

'So, he boils the water, and takes the salt
And the pepper in portions true
(Which he never forgot), and some chopped shalot,
And some sage and parsley too.

'Come here,' says he, with a proper pride,
Which his smiling features tell ;
"Twill soothin' be if I let you see
How extremely nice you'll smell."

'And he stirred it round, and round, and round,
And he sniffed at the foaming froth ;
When I ups with his heels, and smothers his
squeals

In the scum of the boiling broth.

'And I eat that cook in a week or less,
And—as I eating be
The last of his chops, why, I almost drops,
For a vessel in sight I see.

* * * * *
'And I never larf, and I never smile,
And I never lark nor play ;
But I sit and croak, and a single joke
I have—which is to say :

'Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig !'

NODDY'S SITUATION.

IN FIVE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER V.

PEOPLE did talk ; and the bitterness of it to Mrs Muciller was that it was all her own doing. However, she was equal to the occasion. She had made one attempt to bring Julia out at eighteen with indifferent success. As a shopkeeper, whose goods have been exposed in his window for a few weeks, and become a trifle soiled, will remove them to the back of his shop, that they may come out fresh again by-and-by, so Mrs Muciller, whose daughter had become a trifle fly-blown by the exposure, resolved to send Julia to France to finish her education for the second time, to come out fresh at eighteen again in another twelvemonth. It took a few weeks to complete the necessary arrangements for Julia's departure, during which time Mrs Muciller's attention was distracted from Noddy's affairs. The only sentiment of emotion at the *contre-temps* exhibited by Julia consisted in a renewed expression, in song, of something like regret that the 'two leaves were parted in the stream ;' but as to any feeling of emotion, she probably had about as much as the 'other leaf,' that 'floated forward all alone.'

Towards the close of September, a very few days after Miss Julia had become a *pensionnaire* of a Parisian establishment, Mrs Muciller pounced upon an advertisement in the local paper.

'At last!' she exclaimed to Noddy ; 'here is the very thing for you. It seems like a providence. Here have we been trying the London papers for weeks, and the very identical thing suddenly turns up in our own little print. I'll read it :

"Wanted—a Governess. The advertiser wishes to obtain instruction for a child turned eight years old. English only required.—Address W., Pinewood, Lyndhurst, Hants."

Just what you want—no accomplishments whatever mentioned ; so write directly.'

'Yes,' said Noddy, 'I will. I like the look of that advertisement. There is not too much said, and not too much required.'

Noddy wrote three or four notes before she could manage one to suit the conciseness of the advertisement. The one she sent was this :

'September 26, 18—.

'To W.

I think I am competent to undertake the situation.—NORAH CRAY.'

Return of post brought the following reply :

'September 28, 18—.

'To MISS NORAH CRAY.

If Miss Cray is of that opinion, she is requested to be at Lyndhurst Station at 7.15 P.M., to-morrow. Carriage will be sent.—W.'

'P.M.?' Mrs Muciller remarked. 'Not a very suitable time to engage a governess. However, that is not my affair.'

Noddy was so really anxious to secure a situation for which she thought herself qualified, that she would have gone had it been M.M.—twelve o'clock at midnight.

'You will not make any frivolous objections about accepting this situation,' Mrs Muciller said. 'The family, whoever they are, seem evidently disposed to engage you, and you will understand I have no further occasion for your services with me. Should you be engaged at once, I do not even see that it would be needful for you to return. You forgot yourself more than once in your demeanour to a visitor of mine; it is not my wish you should have another opportunity of making a similar mistake. If you return at all, it will be your own fault; and if you suffer for it, it will be a consequence of your own folly.'

'I will really try,' returned Noddy; 'for indeed I am in earnest for employment. But you will not be angry if I return unsuccessful? You would not turn me away?'

'If you return, I do not think I should turn you away. People might talk. I should not turn you out of doors; but if, after once shewing you a separate path from my own, and you refuse it, there should be a way I have not yet tried to make you feel my resentment, I will try to find that way. Until you had the prospect of a situation, I have restrained myself, because to exhibit my feeling would be useless and purposeless. Now, let me tell you that I know something of your deceit and treachery. Thanks to your poisoning Mr Geogagan's mind against my daughter Julia, he left in the sudden and disgraceful manner he did. You need not pretend to innocence. You were walking with him the day we went to the picnic, and your lies have brought all this disgrace about.'

'I assure you it was not so. I never said a word to—'

'You own you walked with him, then?'

'I did,' said Noddy quietly; 'but—'

'Oh, you did! Vastly fine! You did! Mrs Muciller's upper servant and parlour-maid walked out for an airing with Mrs Muciller's guest! Indeed. Cat!' and Mrs Muciller beat herself forward, the better to project her indignation.—'Leave the room without a word, or I may forget my own interest, and once out of the house, may be fool enough to forbid your return, even to such a reception as *I* can give you. Go!'

Noddy was too angry to cry. She went. Mrs Muciller's words were too unjust to stab. No one knew their injustice better than Noddy. The one bit of truth, that she had taken a walk with Mr Geogagan, she was not ashamed of. Mrs Muciller's deduction from it, about its being the means of breaking off Julia's expected match, needed no contradiction. Noddy knew that, and, what is more, knew that her step-mother knew it too. The mistake of women's disputes is their predilection for hanging a quarrel on any peg but the right one. Had Mrs Muciller confined herself to saying she hated Noddy, and always had done so, she would have been completely justified, and would have succeeded in making her victim cry.

The 7.15 train set Noddy down at a little country station, in the middle of the New Forest, amid a wilderness of tree-beauty, with no other habitation in sight for miles than the station-master's house, and the long red roofs of Lyndhurst Union peering out from the distant green. The air was scented with flowers, and musical with bird-voices, and the golden evening haze lay on all the sombre trees, and burned them into a red misty glory.

A few minutes, and a shaggy pony became visible, drawing a small phaeton out of the forest shade! The man drove up, and asked for Miss Cray.

'No luggage, mum, I think?—No. Perhaps you won't mind sittin' by me. The road is roughish, and the front seat is more springy.'

So Noddy perched herself beside the coachman, and the shaggy pony began a shuffling sort of running trot, and the 'carriage' began to glide and bump over the grassy forest-path.

'How far is Pinewood?' Noddy inquired.

'A matter of five mile, mum—miss, I should say—but the road is a rum un.'

So it seemed. Over humps and bumps in the lawny way, and the forest-path twisting and winding about among the majestic trees; the wheels singing pleasantly on the grass, grating a stone here and there, or going over a bough yonder, but the pony shuffling along over everything with a happy see-saw swaying of his head.

'Are they at home?'

'Yes'm—leastways, miss.'

'Who did you say your master was?' Noddy wanted to know something of the folks she was going to.

'I didn't say he was *no* one, did I?' He thought this too sharp, however; for he added: 'He's the governor—that's what he is.'

'And the child?' asked Noddy, a little rebuffed. 'A girl, I suppose?'

The coachman looked at her severely. 'No,' he said doggedly; 'it ain't a girl.—Come up, Peg, can't you?'—the last remark being addressed in a surly tone to the pony.

It was getting dusk when Noddy arrived. She was shewn into a spacious room, comfortably furnished, but plenty of room to walk about. The windows looked out on the billowy forest, now fading into purple gloom, all save the nearest trees, which stood in a silhouette of black lace-work against the twilight sky. Presently, an old lady in black silk entered the room. Not the lady of the house, Noddy judged—more like a motherly housekeeper, than that; but there was a comfortable smile on her face as she said: 'Miss Cray, I believe—in answer to the letter? Will you follow me, my dear?'

Noddy followed her out of the room, and along a cool white hall, to a door. The old lady knocked. 'My master is within; please to enter.'

Master! thought Noddy, and trembled at the prospect of the approaching ordeal; but the housekeeper had opened the door, and Noddy had to go in. The room was larger than the other; it was also darker, inasmuch as the blinds were half-way down, and no lights to enliven the gloom. Noddy could only distinguish dimly the figure of a man, in a great chintz-covered easy-chair, at the far end of the room. She judged him to be elderly by his reclining as if with gout, his legs making two great bolster-like parcels in front of him. The hair that strayed out beneath his velvet skull-cap appeared white, and he addressed her in a slow voice of some firmness. 'Be seated, Miss Cray, if you please.'

Norah took a seat.

'Your letter appeared to me straightforward.'

Norah bowed.

'You think yourself competent for the situation, you say. I hope you have thoughtfully considered the terms in which I advertised, before venturing to make such a statement? It is a situation which will involve some amount of responsibility, as I

wish to depend entirely upon the person whom I may select for the education and general oversight of her charge. I will not conceal from you that that charge, in addition to being a responsible one, may prove a difficult one—the lad to whom I refer having many objectionable propensities, that will require to be watched and corrected.'

'I think you stated in the advertisement the child is eight years of age,' Norah said.

"Turned eight," are the words employed. He is, in fact, "turned eight."

'Then, I think there is every hope that those propensities may be subdued.'

'I hope so. And in proof of your ability to bring about such a result, I conclude you can give me some testimonials, received from previous situations.'

She had not thought of that. 'I have never been out before,' Noddy said.

'H'm. Then your method of procedure would be tentative? That is a grave consideration.'

'I would try to do my best,' said Noddy eagerly, 'if the child is not too old, and not beyond my capacity to teach. I'm not clever nor accomplished, but it was your plainness in advertising led me to think I might suit. You said: "English only required."

'Exactly, but the best of English. And you will bear in mind that there are many more English persons who can talk three or four foreign languages than can speak their own with correctness.'

Noddy's heart began to sink. 'The advertisement doesn't say the best of English,' she said.

'No, it says *English*, and only the very best can be called that.'

Noddy thought of Mrs Muciller and of her own prospects at Braithfield, if she lost this place. She determined on a despairing battle for it.

'But the child is yet young, only eight; and I can teach him till he is ready for some one wiser. Indeed I will do my best.'

'Turned eight—if you please. He is in fact "turned" nine. He is at least ten years of age.'

'Then, Noddy said, just ready to cry with disappointment, 'I suppose I am not competent? You may know better English than I do, but you have not made a brave use of it to torture a poor girl who wants work.'

'Miss Cray, I believe you are so far competent that I have no hesitation in offering you the situation. You speak truth, in spite of its being calculated in many a similar case to lose you an engagement. I therefore see you are likely to give instruction. Will you accept my situation of governess?'

Noddy hardly believed her ears. 'I will,' she said with heartfelt thankfulness.

'You have not mentioned terms, remember.'

'I am content to accept what you may please to offer.'

'Then I have only one other question to put. You may think it a strange one, but I shall be obliged if you will answer it. Do you know what you are?' There was a distinct alteration in the old gentleman's voice that sounded queer.

'No,' Noddy said, blankly enough.

'Then I must ask another. Do you know what day this is?'

'The 29th of September.'

'Then you are the biggest little Michaelmas goose that ever was!' and the elderly gentleman

kicked off his gouty legs, and pitched his skull-cap and wig into the fender; 'and you had better own it, Noddy!'

There stood Mr Frank Geogagan.

'Turned eight, Noddy,' he said; 'and turned eight-and-twenty, for the matter of that. Behold your pupil! Of the establishment, you see I am the governor. You have already given me your promise to be governess. Do you wish to withdraw it?'—and he came towards her.

Noddy was utterly disconcerted for the moment, but she got out of his way. 'Mr Frank,' she said, 'I answered your question, now please answer mine. Do you know what you are?'

'No,' said Mr Frank.

'You are a most dreadful horrid story; that's what you are. You said you had lost all your money.' Noddy was nearly crying.

'No. I said, "all I had in India"—which was quite true, and six thousand pounds. I did not tell you I had brought four times that sum home with me.'

'You told me you were going to seek employment.' Mr Frank was dodging her about the room.

'I did—you told me to go and dig—I came down here and took this little farm, and I have gone and dug, or digged, whichever you prefer.'

'But you don't want a governess, after all; and that was a wicked cheat.'

'But I do, Noddy. I want to be made such a man of as you can love, and you have given your word, you will not refuse. You won't take it back again if you will forgive me the artifice? For I love you as I can love no other woman.'

Mr Frank caught her up. 'It is a very bad story,' she said. But Mr Frank gathered her to him in his arms; and Noddy did not refuse. He folded her to him against his breast, and Noddy did not refuse. He hushed her sobs as she lay nestled against him like a bird that has found shelter. 'I love you with all my heart,' she murmured, 'and I'm so happy!' (in proof of which she was wiping tears from her eyes); 'but you don't think I loved you for your money?'

'I'm sure you didn't, little goose,' said Frank, soothng her with kisses.

'I had rather you hadn't any at all, and that we had to work together.'

'Nonsense, Noddy; you have forgotten you are a little woman of property yourself. Just come out with me and take the first instalment of a quarter's interest for your twenty pounds.' He led her through the house, and out into the dairy, to have a draught of warm new milk. It was from Noddy's investment—the finest milch cow on the farm.

Somewhat, the comfortable old housekeeper didn't seem altogether surprised at Mr Frank walking about the shrubbery with his new governess on his arm; I think she must have been in the secret.

Noddy did not return to her step-mother. In three days she was Mr Frank's wife, and as there were no cards, this is how Mr Geogagan informed Mrs Muciller of Noddy's marriage:

'MADAM—I beg to inform you that Miss Cray has accepted the situation. FRANK GEOGAGAN.'

Pinewood, Lyndhurst.